

**TESTIMONY OF KRISTEN GRIMM
HEARING ON PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE
SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2008**

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member, members of the subcommittee – thank you all for this opportunity to testify before you today on an issue so critical to the health and welfare of the families of this country.

My name is Kristen Grimm. I am President and founder of Spitfire Strategies, a consulting firm based here in Washington DC that provides strategic communications advice to social change organizations, such as non-profits and foundations.

Mr. Chairman, it is a particular privilege to appear before this subcommittee given our longstanding work advocating on behalf of children and families and for the policies that benefit them.

But today, I come before you not merely as an advocate of such

policies, but also as someone who is personally impacted by them – in this case, as an entrepreneur of a small business whose ability to remain competitive and successful is predicated upon attracting and retaining a team of talented professionals.

That is but one of the reasons I am so supportive of your legislation, Mr. Chairman, the Paid Family and Medical Leave Act, to provide employees 8 weeks of paid leave to welcome a child into the family or to care for themselves or a sick family member. To be sure, these are circumstances nearly every American can identify with. And as a small businesswoman I believe paid leave is the kind of policy that will make our economy more competitive and dynamic, much as its parent legislation, the Family and Medical Leave Act, did before it.

Mr. Chairman, when I founded Spitfire in 2002, we were the very definition of a small start-up business – a team of 2, including myself. Since that time, we have grown to employ a team of high-

performing 29 men and women, with a 30th employee likely added this month. We are growing.

I'd be lying if I said it was easy.

As I am sure members of the Subcommittee can appreciate, particularly those who have owned a business themselves, growing a business while remaining competitive at the same time is a constant struggle. Every successful business must put a quality product on the market that fulfills a need. But to continue to do that, you must also be able to support a talented pool of employees.

And today's professional is not merely looking to be well-compensated financially – in an era of skyrocketing health care costs and insecure retirements, they also seek benefits that afford them a decent quality of life. And at a time when two-earner families are the norm in our society, the professionals we seek for our firm want some measure of flexibility in their lives as well –

the ability to spend time with their children or tend to aging parents and grandparents because long-term care is so expensive. Since founding Spitfire, we've had six employees get married, and three have healthy children. One, sadly had a husband diagnosed with cancer and needed to care for him until his death this last year. Each of my employees needs help balancing work and family. I don't believe they should have to figure this out on their own.

Spitfire offers what I believe is a competitive package to help our employees strike that balance, starting with 15 paid holidays and 160 hours time off for vacation and sick leave annually.

We offer up to 12 weeks of pregnancy and maternity leave, six of which is paid, six of which are unpaid. And we also offer paid paternity and domestic partner leave for a birth or adoption.

We also offer three days of paid bereavement leave for employees who have lost an immediate family member and in special

circumstances grant unpaid time off to take care of significant personal business.

The law doesn't require we do any of this – but we do so voluntarily. Why? Some may wonder what kinds of strain it puts on business. Others may want to inquire whether our employees are happier or more productive.

Mr. Chairman, no businessman or woman who spends money for nothing in return will be successful.

But in my experience paid leave to care for family matters is money well spent. For instance, we have many women at our firm, many working at a senior capacity. I'm confident these are the best people in the field at what they do. And quite simply, I don't think we would have been able to attract or retain many of them were they not assured the ability to take the time necessary to start a family.

Do we miss our employees when they are on leave? Of course. But no one can be productive on the job worrying about a sick mother in the hospital.

I myself have taken time off from work to deal with a sick parent – and while I’m the boss, I can tell you, it sends a good message to the rest of the team that they have the same leave benefits as I do.

As I said, we already do this voluntarily – and other than disability insurance which helps pay for part of maternity leave, Spitfire “pays the freight,” as it were.

The Paid Family and Medical Leave Act, on the other hand, would reduce that burden – either by ensuring that 8 weeks would be paid on a shared basis, by the employee, the employer and the government, or by providing our firm with a tax benefit because our policy of 12 weeks exceeds that of the Federal government’s.

In either case, paid leave is a win-win for business, a win-win for family – and, thus, a win-win for the country. It helps our businesses stay competitive and dynamic. It supports our families, as the historic Family and Medical Leave Act has for 50 million Americans. Indeed, as someone who has worked for almost two decades in this field, I believe this legislation will make every bit the historic impact that law has in the past decade-and-a-half.

And so, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, thank you for this opportunity to testify this afternoon – I look forward to the passage of this legislation and hope we can see a day in which every business in America has this policy. Surely, it is an idea whose time has come.

Thank you.